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**7 + 1 Axioms
of Doubt**

Axiom 1: behind the vertical section

cutting permits to look under the skin of things

Merleau-Ponty, *la chair du monde*

Anatomical Drawing

drawing anatomically

my pencil is my knife

the architect a butcher cutting to see.

Vesalius.

scientia non habet inimicum nisi ignorantem

one does not want to look if one does not want to see

I cannot make someone happy by my force of will

not even a good friend

not even a good friend hidden in my drawing

not even if I am cutting my way into the depth of my vertical section as drawing

Axiom 2: after the axiom

depth is the first dimension in architecture

the initial axiom of a space or a stone was

length x width x height

1st x 2nd x 3rd dimension

I learned, so I presumed.

But no.

then I presumed a space or a stone as

length x width x ~~height~~

I had become a thin Cartesian

But no.

subsequently a space or a stone for me became

length x width x depth

almost there I thought ...

But not yet.

rather it is

depth x length x width

1st x 2nd x 3rd dimension

the architectural plan is the derivative of the architectural section

and not the other way round.

So, decide on your principles, your priorities and chronologies

it is time to make your choice now:

the flat Cartesian horizontal plan, or the depth of the vertical section?

Depth is the first dimension in architecture!

Exclamation mark.

I am a mathematician.

Exclamation mark.

Another exclamation mark.

And another.

Axiom 3: thickness in the dark

Reminiscent of the Virgin's *grotto in Lourdes*, my grandmother got herself installed a grotto for the Holy Mary at the south end of the garden. A replica of the Virgin, her eyes glancing to the skies. White candles. Black flowers with a haze. A small bronze plate engraved with the name of a four year old boy, and the number of a year. 1927. The Virgin standing tall in her niche, my eye level at her feet. I had to look up to her in admiration. I could reach the candles. And the flowers. We put some new ones in the vase. Below, the main entrance to the grotto, as high as me, forever a four year old. Growing up was a burden and a disappointment. I stepped into the darkness of the grotto. Two meters appeared to be two times two hundred. I felt the proximity of the massive brick factory chimney behind the infinite depth of the grotto. My time expanded under a lowering vault. At first glued behind me like resin, my own shadow had soon caught up with me and suddenly was running ahead of time, pushing me gently in the back by scarce rays of light that reached towards the invisible vanishing point in the Depth. Unmeasurable. Humidity and vapour revealed projection lines constructed by the invisible draftsman. I gazed at a dark wall that was looming in front of me. This must have been the picture plane where my world was projected upon: my silhouette, my time that had come and gone and come, and my future as I wanted it to be, projected on it as an additional layer on the palimpsest of my infant imagination. I have spent a lifetime to find the exact place from where I would be able to decipher the anamorphosis that brought it all together: my remembrance, my shadow and my dream. But still I could not see it. It was soundless. It was waiting. This wall was rock, and I had to go through it. I wanted it, and I wanted it rough, and it hurt. It smelled like humid moss and molybdenum and fern.¹ In an instant, I remembered what I had seen right at the entrance of the grotto, in the corner of my eye, a small pond made by my grandfather to please my grandmother, with cement and stones like the grotto itself, wherein I sensed exploding flag that smelled like the birth of green spring, abundantly rooting in the swampy soil, and a griffin straightly standing in the middle, with the gesture of a defrosted cat, his claws firmly gripped around the rim of his dado and a thin water jet spitting from his mule, and a pair of black eyes that warned the intruder of the grotto for the price to be paid in exchange for a dream. But I was unafraid, a hero back then. I have been a knight at my age of four, and I was prepared to fight the dragon. I knew that this long and dark grotto would finally end up in the basement of my grandmother's house, because I believed in it, like grannie believed in the Virgin Mary, and in the Immaculate Conception.

It was a gloomy july afternoon, and an electrical storm was threatening in the Southern distance; "Wolfgang Amadeus was not a lightsome man, was he?" grannie suddenly said. I looked around in the darkness of the room and saw curtains of heavy, almost black velvet that deeply obscured the space from where normally light should have come. Then, two mahogany wardrobes loomed very high, closer to me than expected, and they reached up to the ceiling. Their doors had little windows above, behind which moss-green curtains were hanging like silk skirts that hide a secret. The keyhole plates were adorned with bas-reliefs representing candle holders and vases filled with grapes that abundantly hung over their lips. The motif of grapes continued in the brightly sculptured wooden cornices on top of the wardrobes. There, they mutated into angels' heads and feathered wings, and incited by the unchained electrical storm they came into a state of levitation. I was becoming physically unwell, my white eye-balls turning backwards and whirling down again to meet the frames of the Jugendstil doors, only projecting a few millimeters and forming a play of oblique lines with the panels that filled them, suggesting defective flattened perspectives of ancient Egypt. On the floor, a small carpet looked like long black grass in which the mahogany bed was standing. The bed had a high end against the wall, where it was equiped with two lamps shaped like pinkish glass roses. In one of them, a small light bulb produced an almost metaphysical light. My grandmother looked very old, and everything in this room announced the coming of the Man in Black. The air of a sarcophagus had filled the room. I did not want to breathe it, but still it seeped into my every pore. I could choose between the smell or suffocation. I was too young for this. How could the night come so near to a summer afternoon, just one step in and one step out, merely one door away. But wanting to go out, I felt that

¹ "We see the depth, speed, softness and hardness of objects—Cézanne says we even see their odor. If a painter wishes to express the world, his system of color must generate this indivisible complex of impressions, otherwise his painting only hints at possibilities without producing the unity, presence and unsurpassable diversity that governs the experience and which is the definition of reality for us" (Merleau-Ponty 1966).

something very powerful was holding me back, and that this was the price the griffin next to the grotto in the garden had warned me for: "Once you will have penetrated this unknown Darkness of a forbidden room and broken the moratorium, you will be contaminated forever, doomed to slip into other unknown Darknesses, other forbidden rooms, carrying torches in order to unveil them, one by one. You will have to repeat your ritual time and again, to instate the Thickness of Substance in order to first insert the unknown dark solids into your world, so that you can explore them, as a powerful antidote to the boredom of your already known voids of light. With most of your colleague architects endlessly repeating their hollow mantra's of abundant light and *La Ville Radieuse* (Le Corbusier 1924) and so, you will forever feel astranged. A devoted exile in the depth of your celebrated Darkness."

Later, I walked into that low remembrance space, that Northern bedroom in the attic, looking for the assumed second door that I had missed in a remote corner of the furniture workshop in the Southern attic, and that would give access to another stair to bring me to the garret where the television antenna stood. I had to pass by a wardrobe that was as high as the low ceiling. It looked like a medieval triptych. In the mirror that occupied the middle panel of the triptych, I could see myself sneaking by. I slowly turned around the left corner of the wardrobe. Yes, there was a door! And it was identical to all the other doors that had lured me into this labyrinth of doors and stairs with sounds of rooms and substances with odors and doors. It had a doorhandle, and a keyhole, and a key. Now I would finally find my stairs to the supreme summit of the house, where I would stand face to face with the television antenna, where I would be able to see the whole universe, circling above my labyrinth like Daedalos and Icaros, tracing the Minotaur and finishing him off, finally understanding the complexity of my world in exchange for the price the griffin in the garden had warned me for, warned me for *The Man Who Sold The World* (Bowie 1970). But then I would be the one who had discovered it! The Hero! Glory! My cousins would have to bite the dust!

*We passed upon the stair, we spoke in was and when
Although I wasn't there, he said I was his friend
Which came as some surprise, I spoke into his eyes
I thought you died alone, a long long time ago*

*Oh no, not me
I never lost control
You're face to face
With the Man Who Sold The World*

From *The Man Who Sold The World* (David Bowie 1970).

Axiom 4: I vanished beyond the cardinal point

darkness beyond the vanishing point of the central perspective
darkness where all the construction lines of my perspective drawing gather
charcoaled as they are by the absorbing black spot on the paper

Dear spot, I am gazing into you

The real atrocity resides in the fictional horizontal plane that constructs the central perspective and
that slices through the eye of the observer who, as a consequence, cannot see anymore!

My goodness! Darkness!

Darkness, again!

a lot of fear in the mind of my childhood.

a lot of childhood in the fear of my mind.

Axiom 5: time

I had to spend time on silly things.
Too much time. Too many silly things.
And time has expired, and so has my patience.
And yours.
You had given up on me, didn't you?
Lost.
But found.

Axiom 6: not even in a moment of doubt

not even in a moment of doubt,
a minuscule *punctum* in the universe of time?
not even a moment it is,
the universe of time itself is doubt
certainty is merely an invention
an imagined spark as a minuscule *punctum* of hope
so the other way round it seems to be
life is a narrow passage between an endless sea and an endless sea
anxiously we confuse certainty with control
and this acid truth seeps into our every pore
wanting to draw to take control
this is hopeless
Let go man
Let go

Axiom 7: architectural pornography

Sverre Fehn must have gone to Heaven by now.

Yet last night I had a good conversation with him about the erotic capacity of the horizon.

The eye level belongs to the constitution of the body and is therefore unchangeable, that is to say: the only change is my tendency to bend my knees a little in order to move from my current eye level to my infant eye level, because *there* I can re-live my discovery of the world. My subjective camera is physical, thus less susceptible for abstractions, generalisations. Face to face with the substance of the landscape in the excavation cut like a vertical section in the landscape, my nostrils touch the smell of soil, like they touched the smell of woodcurls on top of the working bench in the furniture workshop of my grandfather, the exact level of my nose at my age of four. My nose, back then, was as remote from my eye level as it is now. The precise position of my eye has remained the centre of my world, and every feedback loop reaches out from it, explores and negotiates with the world, and—informed—comes back to it. My eye travels with me, and its level defines the precision with which I want to see (my) architecture inserted in the landscape, the local thickness of my world. This careful negotiation between the architect, who sends sonar signals to the landscape, and the landscape that sends something in return, is the existential *détour*. Reciprocity. Call it negotiated *boomerang* reciprocity.

As for the relationship between the architect and the landscape, I will not discuss the crimes of those architects who do not take the landscape into account. Their meaningless objects of international arrogance pollute the surface of the globe wherever people want to pay for it, not having a connection with the eye level in the central perspective in the way Piero della Francesca would have done, which ties the architect to the place. They represent the prostitutorial and pornographic opposite of my argument.

Scumbags, get lost!

No names. Do not insist.

Axion 8: seven is more

I produced seven axioms
not eight
because seven is more beautiful as a number
because I prefer uneven numbers for their inequality, their endless democratic majorities
because uneven numbers permit to change your mind
because eight is endlessly diabolic
because seven is good
because seven is more than eight
because seven is more
more sevens! more sevens!
please!
but less than eight!